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**Book Review: Why Switzerland?, 2nd edition. Jonathan Steinberg.  
Cambridge University Press, UK, 1996 (328 pages). £40, hardback, ISBN 0  
521 48170 8; £14.95, softback, ISBN 0 521 48453 7.**

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is a subscription agent as well as a publisher) and Leicester University, where Jack Meadows has long studied many aspects of science policy.

*Robert Cahn*

### **Why Switzerland?, 2nd edition**

Jonathan Steinberg

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 1996 (328 pages). £40, hardback, ISBN 0 521 48170 8; £14.95, softback, ISBN 0 521 48453 7.

This is a completely revised edition of a book first published in 1976, after six reprints. The author, a Reader in Modern European History, and Fellow of Trinity Hall in the University of Cambridge, sets himself the task of answering three questions:

- Why has Switzerland survived?
- Why should anyone be interested in Switzerland?
- Can Switzerland survive in the future?

This is, quite simply, an excellent book which is fascinating to read. It reveals Anglo-Saxon reasoning and clarity at its best. It can be recommended to anyone who wants to know more than trivialities about Switzerland.

This reviewer finds it fair to admit that he expected to detect at least some outright mistakes of facts, or at least doubtful interpretations and misunderstandings. He also thought it unlikely that an English person could understand well enough the intricacies of Swiss society.

None of that. In fact it is the other way round: I gained a lot of insights into the workings of my own society. This is perhaps due to the advantage that a foreign author sees many features more clearly and from different perspectives than someone who has always lived in Switzerland. Steinberg is very powerful in identifying the peculiarities of Swissness.

Indeed, why should anybody be interested in Switzerland? Steinberg provides an answer at the very end of the book: “‘People power’ works in Switzerland. The Swiss get the government they deserve, good and hard, but, if they do not like it, they can change it’ (p. 259). This strength of Swiss democracy also means that it ‘offers Europe an alternative to the swollen, self-perpetuating bureaucracy of Brussels’. He even goes further ‘The existing model of the European Union has failed. . . . It will be necessary very soon to learn to govern Europe as if it were Switzerland. . . . The more it (the European Union, BSF) moves to a looser union the more like Switzerland it will become.’ That is of course good news for a Swiss but it would be utterly wrong to assume that Steinberg just adores Switzerland. Quite to the contrary, he is in many ways very critical of a variety of its features. His points of criticism are almost without exception very well taken. But the favourable conclusions quoted above about the democratic institutions of direct democracy and federalism are the result of a careful analysis.

The book is composed of eight chapters. The longest one is on Swiss history: while the material is well-presented, it may be somewhat too long. After all, Steinberg himself notes that Swiss society has changed dramatically over the last few decades, making history of somewhat limited importance. The author acknowledges this himself: 'It is one thing to show why there was a Switzerland in the past, a very different one to answer "Why Switzerland?" now' (p. 72).

Further chapters deal with language, religion and identity. In particular, the ones on language and identity are masterpieces. The only chapter that could benefit from a revision is the one on economics, which the author entitles *Wealth*. While he deals competently with some sectors such as textiles, watches and banks, he is not much at home with macroeconomics. In addition, while all the tables in the rest of the book are updated to the present, the table on Gross National Product (in nominal and real terms) ends with the year 1974. It would have been easy to present informative figures and tables on important issues such as inflation and unemployment (it rose dramatically from virtually nil some ten years ago to almost 5% today).

Overall, it is delightful to know that such a book on Switzerland exists.

Bruno S. Frey

The reviewer, who is Swiss, is Professor of Economics at the University of Zürich

## The Cambridge Illustrated History of Astronomy

Michael Hoskin (Editor)

Cambridge University Press, 1997 (400 pages). £24.95, hardback, ISBN 0 521 41158 0.

The reader of any book, normally starts by looking at its outer cover, then reads the table of contents (and of authors); he or she opens it, leisurely and almost randomly, and starts reading. Often, the reader then closes it quickly and moves on. That first contact gave me the immediate feeling that I would enjoy reading this book more deeply. The dust cover evokes Tycho Brahe's memorable instrumentation, from an old engraving in colour, and the hard cover is of the colour of the starry vault at night, dark blue.

The book's nine chapters seem well balanced, from prehistoric times to today's widening horizons. The authors are few; Hoskin has written the largest part of the book, three chapters with Owen Gingerich (from Harvard; the other authors are British), two with Clive Ruggles and David Dewhirst; others he wrote alone. Only two sub-chapters do not bear his signature: 'Astronomy in China' treated by Christopher Cullen, and J. A. Bennett's chapter 'The Refracting Telescope in the Seventeenth Century'. This gives great homogeneity to the whole book, but perhaps also explains some of its minor failings.

The book is completed by a tabular chronology and a glossary of about 250 words of astronomical and astrophysical jargon. A further appendix is a useful